

# **COULD SOCIAL STUDIES PROVIDE ANSWERS TO THE SOCIO-POLITICAL QUESTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH NATIONAL UNITY IN NIGERIA?**

Oluwatoyin Olusegun Olowo

Department of Social Science Education

Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State

## **Abstract**

This paper tries to examine some of the unresolved socio political, economic and resource control national problems that are calling Nigerian national unity to questioning. It observes that Nigeria, the giant of Africa properly called, is complex in climatic, religious and ethnic ramifications. The paper therefore examines some of these unresolved national issues and concludes that it is only when democratic principles and ethics are applied at home, in schools, offices and religious centres that good governance and national unity could be enhanced in Nigeria.

## **Introduction**

The deliberate attempt made by the colonial masters by amalgamating the Southern and Northern Protectorates in 1914 without considering the heterogeneity of the nation Nigeria, marked the beginning of her unresolved social problems. Howbeit, Nigerian nationalist leaders from different ethnic groups jointly fought vehemently for the independence with one voice but with different motives. The formation of political parties, tribal and cultural organizations like the Egbe Omo Oduduwa, Bauchi Improvement Union, the Ibo Union and a host of others according to Fadeyiye (2005), later became the forum for political agitation. In the first

[Type here]

Republic for instance, all the political parties that emerged were ethnic motivated. The Action Group (A.G.) was Yoruba-speaking party, while the Northern People's congress (N.P.C.) was dominated by the Hausa-Fulani ethnic groups. In the old Eastern Region, the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) was purely Igbo based political party. This equally repeated itself in the Second Republic and in the present political dispensation. All the political parties in the second Republic were regional based. The Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) led by late Obafemi Awolowo was Yoruba-speaking party based. While the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) was dominated by the Hausa -Fulani and Zik led party Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP) was Igbo based party. In the present dispensation, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) the ruling party in Nigeria has its base in the Northern part of Nigeria while other parties like Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN); Labour Party (LP) and other unpopular political parties' emanated from the South-East.

In the year 1999, the Nigeria military relinquished political power after dominating the country's post independence experience for many years and Nigeria hoped for a turn towards democratic governance and respect for human rights. Contrary to this, the Nigerian political culture today is marked by political intimidation, ethnic orientation of political parties, conspiracy of security operatives, ineptitude of electoral umpires, ballot stuffing, ballot snatching, thuggery, money politics and assassination (Falade, 2007; Ojudun 2007; HRW, 2007). At independence, Nigeria inherited series of socio-political conflicts and economic depression. As a result of the multi-ethnic nature of the country, conflicts remain a critical problem and they frequently erupt in Nigeria's over half a century experimental nationhood. Nigeria as a nation has experienced conflicts of dangerous impacts and dimensions between ethnic groups, religious groups, communities as well as political parties.

The unresolved issues cum socio-political matters have generated a lot of controversies which threatened the peace and unity of Nigeria. The situation has become worrisome since the beginning of the current democratic dispensation. For instance, in the South-West (Yoruba-speaking communities) there is agitation for shift of power while in the Niger-Delta regions, there is clamour for resource control as well. Also, conflicts in Nigeria in recent times include: Youth restiveness in the Niger Delta; the Cultural militant group called Oodua People Congress (OPC) in the West, Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra in the East and Arewa Consultative Forum in the North as well as the recent resurgent terrorism of the fundamentalist religious organization called Boko Haram in the north. Going by this analysis, there is need to address the problem of conflict and other unresolved issues in the interest of national unity and Nigeria's democratic consolidation.

### **Ethnicity and Political Conflicts in Nigeria**

One of the major failures of the Nigerian state according to Akin Alao (2012) is its inability to rise to the initial limitation and challenges foisted upon it by British colonialism to create supra institutions that are capable of deemphasizing sub national productivities. In its fifty years of independent nationhood, Nigeria has not been able to appropriate its defining moments and translate them into instances of nation building for political stability and economic development. The evolution of Nigeria as a nation with ethnic, cultural and religious diversity has contributed in no small measure to the near disintegration of the nation witnessed in the Biafran-Nigeria civil war of 1966 which necessitated the reconstruction or re-building of our social, economic and political foundations. Corruption, fraud, religious and political conflicts as well as agitations from marginalization groups in the Niger-

Delta and kidnapping in many parts of the country both for ritual purposes and ransom have hampered development in many parts of the country; and it is a major hindrance to effective growth and nation building in Nigeria (Utulu, 2010).

The foundation of the Nigerian nation since the attainment of independence has been plagued by series of tensions, conflicts and political insurrections that have affected the nations' sustainable development. The new political elite that took over from the colonial masters became the dominant class which employed the ethnic and religious diversities in Nigeria in the intra-class struggle for power. Members of the political class have also shown no restraint in manipulating the people through feeding them with prejudice against the stereotypes about other ethnic groups to win their support for achieving their own self-centred objectives (Tijani 2008, Adedeji 1999).

The Nigeria citizen on the account of ethnicity and political affiliation is also treated as an alien or foreigners in his/her own country as a result of 'state origin' syndrome. On account of this, individuals consider themselves as a member of certain ethnic group before identifying with the state. Oluwasuji, (2006) opined that Nigerians shared their loyalties between the civic state and the ethnic States corroborating this assertion, Mbaku, Agbese and Kineyi (2001) simply puts it that:

*Strong ethnic identification frequently results in the exclusion and marginalization of some groups from the main streams of national policies and the economy. Groups compete to control the political machinery and once in power adopts policies that favour some groups at the expense of others (2001, P3).*

According to Ikwumelu (1996) as cited in Shonekan, the problems confronting Nigeria derive largely from the multi-ethnic, multi- religious and

multi-national nature of our country. In agreement with this, Utulu (2010) remarked that the evolution of Nigeria as a nation with ethnic, cultural and religious diversity has contributed in no small measure to the near disintegration of the nation witnessed in the Biafran - Nigeria civil war of 1966 which necessitated the reconstruction or rebuilding of our social, economic and political foundations. Conflict is capable of not only worsening inter-state relations but also has the potential of provoking hostilities.

The call for rotational presidency for instance, started as a result of fear of domination and marginalization of some ethnic groups by other(s). Some tribal groups thus hold that the only way to avert this is to rotate the leadership (or the power base) of the country from one section to another. (Ikwumelu, 1996).

### **Historical Analysis of Religious Violence in Nigeria.**

Since colonial times, Nigerians have witnessed several devastating religious Crises; Nigeria has been divided between a majority Muslim north and predominantly Christian south. This division according to a Symposium on Religious Conflict in Nigeria (2007) became more important after the country's independence in 1960. Before this time, thirty percent of Nigerians were either Christian or Muslim. Both faiths have grown, but Christianity has risen dramatically from some twenty-one percent of the population in 1950 to about forty- eight percent: This increase in numbers as stressed by Father Mathew Kukah of the Catholic archdiocese of Nigeria, heightened Christian participation in Nigerian politics. This equally increased religious tension between Christians and Muslims. The Nigerian government reports up to fifty thousand deaths from religious violence since the mid-1990s, this figure however is disputed by other Sources.

Yusuf (1999), opined that most religious crises recorded so far in Nigeria had political undertones. He also stressed that in some cases where the crisis occurred, it would still be hijacked by some disgruntled elements to facilitate the achievement of their selfish interest or personal aggrandizement, religious violence could be seen from lack of religious tolerance between the different religious groups and the inability or unwillingness to endure different religious opinion. Also, ignorance on the part of different religions adherents has resulted in religious violence. When the different interacting religious groups fail to the increasing wave of appreciate each other's merit and contributions, because they do not possess the knowledge of the others people's point of view, the result will be faulty judgment and erroneous conclusion (Akinseye, 2008). A look at the various religious violence in Nigeria between 1980 and 2006, their involvement, characteristic features and consequences could provide more explanations on the forgoing.

This is provided in the Table 1 below.

Considering the historical analysis provided in the table, one can see clearly how many lives and uncountable property were wasted on account of religious conflicts in Nigeria. Between 2006 to date, Nigeria has witnessed terrorism of fundamentalist religious organization called Boko Haram in the north. This armed religious group has caused tension and fear in the lives of Nigerians. Many lives were wasted and many churches were destroyed by this group. This, however, add more to the religious intolerance recorded in the past years and a pointer to the whole world that Nigeria as nation still have more hurdles to Cross. The effort put in place by the federal government to tackle this problem is yielding little progress as the faceless groups are advancing to many states on daily basis.

**Socio-Economic and Political Problems in Nigeria: - Delta as a Case Study:**

Nigeria is blessed with vast land mass, large and heterogeneous population, bewildering language diversities leading sometimes mutual suspicious of domination. Niger Delta area for instance has become a lot of bed of violence, insurgency, kidnapping, hostage taking, oil pipeline sabotage, crude oil theft, gang wars, internecine struggle and so much else by way of anarchy and chaos. This region according to Afinotan and Ojakorotu (2009) is therefore Nigeria's lot bed of ethnic violence, terrorism and insurgency. But in the midst of unchecked violence and a revolving criminality, together with the resultant widespread anxiety to douse tension and appease the militants, the real issues seem to have been forgotten, and prescribed solution rendered puerile. It is a sorry case to note that the Niger delta area where the resources of the nation is coming from is militating with poverty, degradation, unemployment, environmental pollution, economic and socio-political alienation, disease and squalor. This however contradicts what the colonial administration had sought in 1945:

*To create a political system within which the diverse elements may progress at varying speeds. Amicably and smoothly, towards a more closely integrated economic, social and political unity, without sacrificing the principles and ideas in their divergent ways of life.*

There should therefore be frantic efforts to ensure that the diverse elements in the country progress at the same speed towards a political unity, sacrificing divergent ways of life in the process. In this regards, Niger Delta and other minority ethnic groups should not be left out. Today, emphasis is shifting from mere bread-and-butter issues to serious questions by the people of the region, regarding the status, role and place within the larger Nigeria policy (Ukeje, 2004). The agitations of the Niger-Delta youths have provoked trenchant clamours for greater fiscal federalism

and minority rights. These agitations are also leading to more pungent questions about citizenship rights, duties and obligations and the moral circumstances, under which these could be challenged, negated, withheld or even jettisoned. The fact that government can no longer extract voluntary obedience from the citizens, as exemplified by the visible presence of soldiers on internal peace enforcement in the Niger Delta, points to a moral crisis of the authority and a serious problem of legitimacy for the federal government in the region. It is also important to note that militant youth movements are mostly drawn from a growing pool of illiterate and unemployed youths are attracted to violence for pecuniary benefits. Nigeria government inability or lack of political will to address the issues of unemployment may be blamed for the uprising in the Niger Delta (Soremekun, 1995; Eyinola & Ukpo, 2006; Ukeje, 2004).

The agitation of the Niger Delta and the slogan of resource control do not emerge over-night. The oil producing areas believe they are being marginalized and subjected to unfold hardship from environment degradation by the multinational oil companies operating in the areas. They often complain of neglect by the government and lack of adequate compensation of these oil companies. In support of this, Oluwasuji (2008) lamented that- the Niger Delta account for about 90% of the Nigeria's external earning and wealth, yet, this area wallows in abject poverty, neglect and deprivation with basic means of livelihood eluding the area.

The crisis in the oil producing area and the call by them for autonomy will persist until decisive actions are taken by the government to answer the grievance of the oil producing areas.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**



The role of Social Studies as a school discipline in the addressing Nigeria Socio Political, Economic and other related problems cannot be sidelined. This is because the discipline is not only assisting the youth to understand the Nigerian society, people and their problems, but also in equipping them with the knowledge, understanding and competences to assist in the society. Nigerian Social Studies Curriculum has been tailored to provide and equip the youth with the relevant skills, knowledge, attitudes and values that would enable them to be capable of addressing the unresolved problems and issues in their immediate environment. The integrated nature of social studies makes it possible for emerging national and global issues, cutting across a number of disciplines, to be incorporated into it, as recent curriculum revision exercise have been demonstrated.

Having discovered and established the unresolved social- political issues and national unity of Nigeria, it is necessary at this juncture to suggest on how some of these social problems or issues could be curbed in Nigeria.

1. Religious adherents and leaders of the main religious (Islam and Christianity) should preach and demonstrate tolerance with a view of accepting and accommodating others not practicing their religions. Also, Nigeria youths should not be made themselves to be used by some political jobbers for the attainment of their selfish political agenda at the expense of the corporate existence of Nigeria as a nation.
2. The adherents of the religion should not see religion as do-or-die affairs but rather adhere strictly to the tenets of their religions. They should uphold at all times the sanctity of human life and emphasize the freedom of religion mutual harmony and co-existence.

3. Equal opportunity should be given to all Nigerian citizens in terms of political participation and strict observance of federal character as entrenched in the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria. This will guarantee an atmosphere devoid of suspicion of one ethnic group by the other feeling of segregation or marginalization in the scheme of issues. In addition to this, the principles and ethics of democracy should be adhered to that is, "one man one vote" which devoid rigging and election manipulation. This will cement the unity of Nigeria as a nation.
4. The 13 percent derivation formula should be implemented to the letter by the government and should be reviewed upward. In addition to this, the oil producing areas or Niger Delta areas governors should endeavour to utilize their enormous income from the federation account to uplift the standard of living of their people. If this is done, some religious, the Niger Delta will lead to a crisis free Niger Delta
5. The constitution imbalances alleged by some ethnic groups in the country. The entrenchment of rotational presidency amongst the six geo-political zones in the country would go long way in dousing political tension and cry of marginalization by some ethnic groups in Nigeria.
6. The Sovereign National Conference agitating for by many Nigerians should be employed as the last resort if all attempts fail to achieve the desired result of restructuring the polity. We should strive to achieve true federalism in the interest of national unity of our Nation (Nigeria).

## References

Afinotan, L.A & Ojakorotu, VV (2009). The Niger Delta crisis; issues, challenges and prospects. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 3 (5) pp. 191-198.

Akinseye, F.A. (2008). Religion, Insurrections and Democracy in Africa: A case study of Nigeria. *Journal of Issues on Africa Development*, 1(1). Alafas Nigeria Company, Ibadan, Nigeria.

Alao, A. (2012). Ethics and religious conflicts and their implications for National Security in Nigeria, Ondo: Olajesu.

Eyinola, O. & Ukp0, J. (2006). Nigeria: The Travesty of Oil and Gas Wealth, Lagos: The Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria.

Fadeyiye, O. (2005). A Social Studies Text Book for Colleges and Universities (part one), Ibadan: Akin- Johnson Press and Publishers.

Ikwumelu, S.I. (1996). The Unresolved Issues in Nigeria.

Mbaku, J.M. (2001). "Ethnicity, constitutionalism, and governance in Africa. In Mbaku, J.M., Agbese, PO & Kimenyi, M.S (eds (2001). Ethnicity and governance in the third world, England. Ashgate.

Oluwasuji, C.O (2006b). 'Managing National Question in Nigeria Imperative For alternative strategies In 'expertus" *Journal of Sustainable Development*, Department of Sociology, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Nigeria 4 (1). 2006.

Oluwasuji C.O. (2008). 'Governmental policies and ethnic insurrection in Nigeria. The Niger Delta question" *Journal of issues on African development* 1(1) Alafas Nigeria Company Ibadan, Nigeria.

Soremekun, K (1995). "Oil and Democratic Imperative in Nigeria" In Olowu et al (eds.). Governance and democratization in Nigeria, Ibadan: Spectrum Book.

Summary: A Symposium on Religious Conflict in Nigeria (2007) "Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life" Council of Foreign Relations; Religious Conflict in Nigeria.

Tijani, A. (2008) Ethnic identify and the national question in Nigeria (1960-1970) "Journal of Issues on African development 1(1) Alafas Nigeria Company Ibadan, Nigeria.

Ukeje, C. (2004). Oil capital, ethnic nationalism and civic conflicts in the Niger Delta. Unpublished PhD Thesis, submitted to the Department of International Relations, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

Utulu, R.E. (2010). Civic Education, Democracy and Nation Building in Nigeria: Conceptual Perspective. A lead paper presentation at the 26th National Annual Conference of the Social Studies Association of Nigeria Umar Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina.

Yusuf, O.A. (1999). Crisis Management in Nigeria: A lecture delivered at the Annual Post Graduate Students' Association University of Ilorin.

**Table 1: A chronicle of social crises in Nigeria from 1980 to date**

Date	Towns	States	Features	Consequence	Sources
1982, 1984	Bulunkutu a suburb of Maiduguri and Jimejuta suburb of yola	Kano	Mohammed Marwa killed his disciples dispersed	400 people were killed in Bulunkutu	Olupona (1986) and Nigerian, Concord 1984 Preaching outside the Churches and Mosques.
1985	Gombe	Gombe	Hausa/Fulani were involved	Inflation government banned religious preaching and side the churches and	Akorede 1997

				mosques	
1987	Kano	Kano	Maitasine deported Cameroun recruited. Over ten thousand people against practicing Islam and in the State.	Conflagration in which at least 100 people were killed at Gombe. The violence led to killing of 4,177 people.	Olupona (1986)
1987	Kafanchan	Kaduna	Christian/Muslim fight	Arson, hundreds	Newswatch were also killed March 23, 1987 and April 1987:26.
1993	Bauchi and Salewa	Bauchi			Daily Times 1991
1993	Funtua	Katsina	Kalakatos unleashed war on the people they called the Kaffris	Over 200 people were killed and large amount of essential properties were destroyed.	Adedeji in Akorede (1994).
1986,1998	Oweri, Lagos, Ilorin	Imo, Lagos, Kwara	Muslims/Christians	Bible were torn, attempt were made to set fire on in Christian simply because of Palm Sunday procession.	Adeniji (1997) in Arowolo 2005.
March April 2000	Kaduna	Kaduna	Christian Muslim fight over implementation of Sharia Laws in Northern Nigeria.	Burning and destruction of Churches and mosques.	Alli 1993, p. 123.
2000	Warri, Benue, Nasarawa	Delta, Benue, Nasarawa	Ethno- religious Conflict	Loss of innocent lives and destruction of properties	Malor (2000)

Between 1980 and 2000	Iseyin	Targeted at Christian i.e. Southerners, Iseyin, because family solidarity was more important to the Southerners than solidarity.	Thirty-six religious violence have so far been recorded in Oyo State, Nigeria.	Property damaged 40 churches, 3 mosques, 46 private houses, 19 vehicles, 9 cattle were killed	The News Magazine Fawole in Babalola 2002.
2002	Adamawa, Kaduna	Adamawa, Kaduna	Dispute between Muslim cattle rancher and Christian farmer. There was burning and looting	Led to the death of at least nine persons burning down. This day office in Kaduna	Efe M. 2007. A journalist Isioma Daniel of This Day
March 6, 2006	Kano, Maduguri, Kaduna	Kano Borno Bauchi Zamfara Enugu , Abia, Delta and Anambra	Muslims took to the streets of the Metropolis to protest against Mohammed offensive cartoons.	Many people were killed and properties worth millions of Naira	Tell No. 10 March March 5, 2006
30 March, 2006	Patani	Delta State	Clash of faiths turn bloody as traditional religionists	Carting away an Elimax Model 6,000 generator and a lead guitar worth N224,000 the winds shield of a bus Owned by Emmanuel Anglican Church was smashed.	The News No. 15, 24 April, 2006
July 3, 2009	Onitsha	Anambra State	The violence was reported have sparked off by brutal murder of a young	Release of 2004 inmates of the person earlier in February 700 inmates released from same prison	Tell No. 27 July 3, 2006

			trader lkachuwku Ede. inmates of the person	loos of lives	
--	--	--	---	---------------	--

**Source:** Adapted from Akinseye F.A. (2008) in Religion, Insurrections and democracy in Africa. A case study of Nigeria Pp 149-150.